



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN PLAN
WOULD SAVE 17,000 JOBS; PRESERVE NORTHERN SPOTTED OWLS

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan today announced an alternative proposal to preserve the northern spotted owl while saving more than 17,000 jobs that would be lost in the Pacific Northwest under a draft recovery plan for the threatened bird.

"Our preservation plan takes a common sense, middle ground approach that will save more than half of the 32,100 timber industry and related jobs that would be lost through strict compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA)," Lujan said.

The Secretary said the Administration is not sending a bill to Congress, but is making its alternative available to members of Congress who have asked for ideas on how to reduce the adverse economic impacts that would result from the draft recovery plan.

The alternative would reduce the number of designated conservation areas (DCAs) from 196 to 75, and the total restricted acreage from 5.4 million acres of federal land to 2.8 million acres. It also would ease partial restriction on timber harvesting on 4.9 million acres of federal forest land outside of the recovery plan conservation areas.

"We can preserve and maintain the owl at less than half the cost in jobs, and I think we should do it," Lujan added. "A full recovery plan for the owl will have enormous adverse impacts on families, communities and counties in the Pacific Northwest."

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The proposed preservation plan was drawn up by a team established by Lujan to provide an alternative to the Draft Recovery Plan released today in Portland, Oregon, by the Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Team. The Recovery Team followed the dictates of the ESA in drafting its plan to establish a network of 196 DCAs covering about 5.4 million acres of federal lands where timber harvesting would be prohibited or strictly managed.

The alternative would modify the recovery plan by deleting DCAs and other restrictions on timber harvest in the Olympic Peninsula, western Washington lowlands, Oregon Coast Range, Oregon Klamath (except for one unit), California Cascades and California Coast provinces, and those DCAs north of the I-90 highway corridor. Specified DCAs in the California Klamath province also are deleted.

The alternative proposal leaves the DCA network and other protections proposed in the draft recovery plan intact in the Cascade Mountains from I-90 to the California border and in the California Klamath province. These areas are sufficient to provide continued support for a substantial population of owls.

Biologists who helped devise the draft recovery plan also reviewed the alternative proposal. They reported that under the alternative proposal there is a reasonable likelihood that stable owl populations will be achieved in more than one province, and that the probability of extinction is low for the next 100 years. They did find, however, that the risk of extinction would increase significantly "over a much longer timeframe" and that full implementation, which they assumed would mean harvesting of all unprotected owl habitat within 40-50 years, would be "an essentially irreversible decision."

The preservation plan includes a number of features designed to avoid the total elimination of owl habitat in unprotected areas and to reduce the risk of extinction. For example, the plan recommends the establishment of alternative forest management techniques to promote the growth of habitat suitable for northern spotted owls, to speed up the regeneration of owl habitat and to improve forest productivity. Widespread application of such forest management techniques could, over the long run, provide much greater habitat for owls and other wildlife than current timber cutting methods.

In addition, the preservation plan seeks to improve owl survival through active intervention, including the establishment of one or more captive populations and the testing of experimental management techniques such as artificial nest structures, prey management and trapping and transport.

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The Preservation Team consists of David C. O'Neal, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management; Mike Hayden, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks; John E. Schrote, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Policy, Management and Budget; and John H. Beuter, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and Environment. Ed Cassidy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Policy, Management and Budget, served as coordinator for the team.

"In putting the alternative together, we focused on changes in the draft recovery plan that would have the greatest benefit in jobs with the least impact on the survival of the northern spotted owl," Cassidy said. "We also tried to reduce the job-loss impacts on specific counties that are most dependent upon timber for their economy and tax base."

The preservation plan, as compared with the draft recovery plan, is designed to save approximately 4,000 jobs in Washington, 11,000 jobs in Oregon, and 2,000 jobs in northern California.

Although the alternative would not include DCAs in certain areas, such as the Olympic Peninsula and in the northern-most portion of Washington, Interior officials stressed that these areas contain national parks and wilderness areas that are not available for logging, providing old growth forests that serve as habitat for northern spotted owls.